ABSTRACT

The success of marketing destinations for Muslim tourists could be guided by observing Islamic teachings in tourism activities. This study is a trial to explore which Islamic attributes of destinations could be used as a base for tailoring Halal tourist packages. Qualitative data were collected by conducting two focus group discussions and fifty three interviews in Malaysia. Two major aspects are identified which may attract Muslim tourists. Some suggestions are also presented to satisfy Muslim tourists. Copyright © 2010 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Keywords: Islamic attributes; destination marketing; Muslim tourist; Islamic tourism.

INTRODUCTION

Literature on tourism and destination marketing research is rich with key themes that seek to explain why people travel and select specific destinations. Many of the studies are based on the theory of pull and push motivations (Jamrozy and Uysal, 1994; Hanqin and Lam, 1999; Jang and Cai, 2002; Bogari et al., 2004; Yoon and Uysal, 2005; Jang and Wu, 2006; Kim et al., 2006; Correia et al., 2007). The theory posits that tourists are pushed by internal desires or emotional factors to travel as well as pulled by external factors in the form of the attributes of various destinations. While many studies have been conducted to investigate the various types of destination attributes, there has been a lack of research on the religious attributes of the destination and its impact on tourist’s choice as well as satisfaction. Moreover, when it comes to Islamic religious attributes, the lack of study is more noticeable and profound. The objective of this study is to investigate whether there exists a basis for segmenting the tourism market by Islamic religious attributes through studying the views and opinions of tourists visiting Malaysia.

The Muslim tourism segment may consider a target for destination marketers. Assuming religion represents one of important factors in the decision-making process with regard to travel destinations (Collins and Tisdell, 2002), it is important to ensure that Islamic religious attributes are available in those destinations. This may lead to tourist satisfaction as well as encourage multiple return visits. Muslims are well ordered to follow Islamic teachings which directly and indirectly impact on their decisions concerning leisure and travel plans (Zamani-Farahani and Henderson, 2010). In this regard, plans to market destinations for Muslim tourists should be guided by Shariah (Islamic code of life) rules specifically those that pertain to tourism activities.

In recent years, it has been observed that there is a growing interest in new tourism concepts such as ‘Islamic tourism’. Another concept is ‘Halal hospitality’ which is akin to the concept of ‘Halal food’, a concept already recognized in many countries including those in the Middle East (World Travel Market [WTM], 2007).
this to be a new phenomenon in the United Arab Emirates and Middle Eastern countries. Islamic tourism has attracted many tour packages entirely based on what they term ‘Islamic culture’ (Javed, 2007), which is defined as a type of religious tourism that is in conformity with Islamic teachings regarding behaviours, dress, conduct and diet (WTM, 2007). Heyer’s (2008) elaboration on the rapid large-scale development of ‘Shariah-compliant hotels’ is but another expression of the existing trends towards increased Islamization of activities, which in the past focused more on banking, insurance and finance. Thus, tourism is generally encouraged by Islamic law as following the religion entails etiquettes, mannerisms, rules and regulations regarding conduct, dress, food and prayer (Zamani-Farahani and Henderson, 2010).

Islamic tourism operators target families from the Persian Gulf known for their conservative interpretation of the teachings of Islamic Shariah. The WTM report (2007) shows that Islamic tourism has the potential to develop into a resilient market. Promising market potentialities cause it to be targeted by industry operators and market researchers. Focus on this market is further increased by a forecasted increase in growth, whereby tourist income for the Middle East is expected to grow 108% to a staggering US$51 billion while domestic tourism is expected to grow by 82% to reach US$24 billion by 2011. Much of the forecasted growth is due to increased numbers of Middle Eastern Muslim tourists that underlines the need for tailored Islamic tourism packages offering services catering to Muslim needs.

The negative side of western tourism causing Islamic tourism to be increasingly popular among some conservative Muslims are issues that have a negative impact on the Muslim community such as the consumption of alcohol, prostitution, inappropriate dressing, kissing in public and open affection between sexes in public (Sindiga, 1996). In addition to that, the traditional Arab and Muslim choice of USA and Europe destinations has changed since the September 11 attacks with Middle Eastern and Muslim countries becoming increasingly popular destinations for Muslim tourists (Henderson, 2003). As a result, intratourism in the Middle East and Muslim countries has boomed remarkably (Al-Hamarneh and Steiner, 2004).

In response to this, the current study is an attempt to greater understand the new concept of ‘Islamic tourism’.

Muslims constitute a global market of 1.82 billion potential customers (Muslim Population Worldwide, 2009). Islamic religious attributes are bound to be very important considerations when a Muslim decides to travel abroad. Given the potential problems expected from non-Islamic tourism, the Muslim tourist may decide not to travel to a particular destination due to the absence of these attributes. According to Uysal et al. (2008, p. 413), a study of the particular attributes of any given destination would provide clues and/or insights that destination marketers could use in developing and promoting their tourism destinations. Bogari et al. (2004) claim that destination attributes and issues pertaining to Islamic culture were not sufficiently covered by researchers. In effect, the study focuses in the Islamic attributes of destinations that could be used as a base to attract Muslim tourists in destination marketing programmes.

The marketing of Islamic destinations is certainly not an easy task (Henderson, 2008b) because of the variance between the demands of western tourists and the Islamic teachings. Therefore, exploring Islamic attributes may help destination marketers to tailor products and services that satisfy Muslim tourists that may increase the number of inbound tourists and improve economic growth. Marketers may also use Islamic attributes in promotional programmes. In addition, this study attempts to offer insights into the tourism expectations and experiences of followers of the Islamic religion. Muslim tourists could be influenced by religious aspects in their destination choice. Thus, the research question of this study is what types of Islamic attributes of destination satisfy Muslim tourists. Therefore, the objective is to explore which Islamic attributes of destinations such as worship facilities and Halal food that may be important to the Muslim tourist; especially in the Muslim world.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Religion plays a large influence on many people’s behaviour as customers (Essoo and Dibb,
2004). In the context of tourism, religion may influence the choice of destination and tourists’ product preferences (Weidenfeld and Ron, 2008). According to Poria et al. (2003), the effects of religious belief on behaviour come from two main sources. The first is the explicit and clear guidelines on acceptable and unacceptable behaviour or practices. Examples consist of the religious rules prohibiting Muslims from consuming pork, or Hindus from consuming beef. The second means by which behaviour is influenced is the fact that religion shapes the culture, attitudes and values of society. This is supported by Grigg (1995) whose research provides evidence on the influence of religion and religiosity on dietary habits. Further support is found in Essoo and Dibb (2004), who demonstrated the influence of religion on consumer behaviour by identifying the differences in consumer spending between Muslims and Hindus.

Although the relationship between tourism and religion has been addressed in the literature on tourism, there remains a shortage of theoretical publications in the area of tourism in the context of Islam. Religion and religiosity are acknowledged factors influencing behaviour according to various social settings. In spite of this widely acknowledged fact, research that explores relationships between religion, behaviour and tourist destination choice remains highly limited (Din, 1989; Rinschede, 1992; Fleischer, 2000; Howe, 2001; Poria et al., 2003; Weidenfeld, 2006; Weidenfeld and Ron, 2008). Din (1989) argues that social scientists have tended to overlook the importance of religion in tourism studies. Its importance is emphasized by Weidenfeld and Ron (2008) who underline the general importance of the relationship between tourism and religion. For this reason, Heo et al. (2004) recommend more related studies that identify and discuss special tourist requirements and preferences. Although neglecting to mention religion specifically, Meng et al. (2008) conclude that tourists are more likely to choose destinations believed to best satisfy tourist ‘push’ needs and preferred destination attributes.

Studies conducted in this area include Weidenfeld (2006) that investigates the religious needs of Christian pilgrims in the tourism industry. Likewise, Hoffmann (1994 cited in Weidenfeld, 2006) conducts research on Jewish ultra-orthodox tourism segment. In addition to this, some papers complement the aforementioned research by discussing the religious requirements in the tourism food sector. For example, Dugan (1994) presents the religious necessities in food supply for Muslim, Christian, Jews, Hindus and Buddhists.

When it comes to the relationship between tourism and religion, particularly Islam, the lack of literature is more obvious, especially regarding Islamic religious attributes and their impact on tourist needs in general and Muslim tourists in particular. Very few studies available typically focus on the needs of Muslim pilgrims’ (when they visit Makkah for the Hajj) (Ahmed et al., 2006; Memish, 2007; Shafi et al., 2008) rather than the needs of tourists. However, Weidenfeld and Ron (2008) forecast increased number of religiously minded tourists who join dynamic multi-purpose packages especially from developing countries many of which are Muslim countries.

**Religious attributes**

What does the term ‘religious attributes’ of destinations really mean? There are many aspects that can constitute ‘religious attributes’ of destinations. The following sections present the literature on the matter:

- **Hotels meeting the religious needs of patrons.** Additional religious services and provisions in hotels may result in attracting new markets and improved hotel rates (Weidenfeld, 2006). A study in Israel conducted by Mansfeld et al. (2000) recommended placing ‘Makkah stickers’ or ‘Qibla stickers’ (stickers with ornamented arrows pointing towards the city of Makkah in Saudi Arabia for prayer directions) as well as placing a copy of the Quran in every room occupied by Muslim visitors. Din (1989) found that hotels in Kuantan, Malaysia, catered to Muslim needs in the hospitality industry by requiring first-class hotels to provide prayer rooms fully equipped with prayer mats, the Quran, Suruh Yasin and Tasbih, plus Qibla stickers.
Weidenfeld (2006) presented a number of suggestions to improve the religion-friendliness of hotels. The suggestions begin by simply providing a bible in hotel rooms along with providing information on religious activities and institutions. This keeps religiously minded tourists in direct contact with scripture and informed of available services. Employment of Christian workers creates a religious atmosphere in the hotel. The hotel may choose to organize its own religious activities. It should provide a place of worship within the hotel itself or be in close proximity to a church. Christian symbols within a hotel such as a cross and images of the Virgin Mary help to provide a religious environment and décor.

Religious values play a role in catering to religious needs. For example, Collins-Kreiner and Kliot (2000) hypothesizes the Protestants’ need for a bible in hotel rooms based on their belief in direct communication with God. Fleischer (2000) compares between Catholic and Protestant pilgrims in terms of the peculiarities of their tourist needs. The study reveals that Protestants appreciate religious symbols and opt for religious-sensitive tourist packages more so than Catholics. Moreover, Weidenfeld (2006) recommended catering to such Christian needs in the hotel room as that may increase the satisfaction of Christian tourists.

Empirical studies on the impact of catering to Islamic religious needs and the level of satisfaction of Muslim tourists are very few. Some of the studies discuss services of this nature that may include Muslim religious restrictions such as activities of vice and forbidden entry for unmarried couples (Din, 1989; Henderson, 2003; Zamani-Farahani and Henderson, 2010). They also found that hotels may provide religious information such as the location of nearby mosques or prayer times and nearby Halal restaurants (Henderson, 2003). Furthermore, as Muslims avoid free mixing between the sexes, hotels could offer separate swimming pools and recreational facilities (Henderson, 2003; Al-Hamarneh and Steiner, 2004; Timothy and Iverson, 2006). Hashim et al. (2007) suggested that availability of Halal food and a list of nearby Halal restaurants on hotels would satisfy Muslims in their holidays. Timothy and Iverson (2006) also suggested that hotels should educate their staff on cross-cultural communication to allow them to treat Muslim tourists with respect and consider recruiting religious staff. In addition, it may be better if there are staff hostels for men and women (Henderson, 2003).

Places of worship. The five daily prayers are of great importance to practising Muslims. Therefore, the mosque (a Muslim house of worship) or prayer room is considered to be one of the most crucial facilities for Muslims (Syed, 2001; Al-Hamarneh and Steiner, 2004). Weidenfeld (2006) suggests that proximity to a mosque may influence Muslim tourist preferences when making hotel reservations. Mohsin (2005) conducted a study to assess Peninsular Malaysians attitude towards choosing the Northern Territory of Australia for a holiday as a tourism destination and found that Muslim respondents were concerned about the availability of mosques.

Mohsin and Ryan (1997) recommend that the ease of access to Islamic services are important when they explored the attitudes of Malaysian and Indonesian business people towards the possibility of holidaying in Australia. It is also suggested that Middle Eastern countries take concrete steps to develop Islamic tourism internally by having prayer rooms at tourism sites (WTM, 2007). Syed (2001) also suggested that the availability of mosques at tourist destinations may increase satisfaction levels. The mosque itself may be considered a tourist attraction if they are unique and outstanding (Henderson, 2003).

Availability of Halal food. Dugan (1994) presented findings on food service requirements by Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Christians. Evidence from Brown’s (1996) ethnographic study shows the influence of religious prohibitions on determining their expectations regarding services provided by a hotel such as appropriate ingredient choice and preparation. This is further supported by Williams (2002) who identified the role of the Jewish Kashrus (Jewish religious requirements) in prohibiting certain foods and regulating compliance procedures for food preparation.

For Muslims, the issue is centred on the concept of Halalness. Halal food refers to food that can be lawfully consumed when...
conditions for Islamic food preparation are met. Food that is unlawful to Muslims includes pork, pork-derived foods including lard and bacon and meat and other products from carnivorous animals or those that feed on carrion. Consumption of any food or drinks with alcoholic content is also prohibited (Dugan, 1994).

One important distinguishing feature of the Halal label is that animals must be slaughtered in a specific way and with the person carrying out the slaughter reciting the name of Allah (God).

There are many studies that show the importance of the availability of Halal food to Muslims in choosing their tourist destinations (Mohsin and Ryan, 1997; Syed, 2001; Mohsin, 2005; Weidenfeld, 2006; Weidenfeld and Ron, 2008). The importance of this to some Muslims is reflected by the fact that even when served Halal food, many are still concerned over whether the food is genuinely Halal. Henderson (2003) found that some firms in the Western tourism industry are concerned over this issue. Some Muslims ask about the ingredients the meal is made up of because pork and alcohol in all its many forms are forbidden. Therefore, meals which are provided to Muslim have to be alcohol- and pork-free, and the utensils have to be uncontaminated by these two elements (Dugan, 1994).

Catering to Muslim tourists’ needs in terms of providing Halal food in any particular destination may increase their overall satisfaction and loyalty. Mansfeld et al. (2000) gives explicit recommendations for providing food which complies with Shariah laws. Therefore, a caterer who is aware on how to satisfy Muslims or who offers religious groups’ dietary needs will attract more Muslim customers (Dugan, 1994).

Banning of alcohol consumption and gambling. According to Islamic Shariah, it is completely forbidden for Muslims to drink or sell alcohol. Muslims are also prohibited from gambling and being involved in the gambling industry. It is stated in Holy Qur’an: ‘O ye who believe! Intoxicants and gambling, (dedication of) stones, and (divination by) arrows, are an abomination,— of Satan’s handwork: eschew such (abomination), that ye may prosper’ (Holy Qur’an, 5: 90). Moreover, the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: ‘Alcohol is the mother of all evils and it is the most shameful of evils’ (Ibn Majah, 2004). It is also not permissible for Muslims to visit places where alcohol is consumed and gambling is practised (Din, 1989; Henderson, 2003, 2008a; Al-Hamarneh and Steiner, 2004; Hashim et al., 2007; Zamani-Farahani and Henderson, 2010).

Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Bangladesh and Pakistan implement very restrictive policies on public consumption of alcohol and gambling. However, in some other Muslim countries, such as Egypt and Turkey, the situations are not so restrictive. For example, in most states in Malaysia, alcohol is freely available although Muslims can be punished for drinking in public (Aljazeera, 2009).

Sexual permissiveness. The Shariah expressly forbids Muslims from engaging in fornication or adultery. Activities deemed conducive to sexual permissiveness are not allowed to take place in public. This is based on many verses in The Holy Quran including like: ‘Nor come nigh to adultery: for it is a shameful (deed) and an evil, opening the road (to other evils)’ (Holy Qur’an, 17: 32).

Many Muslim scholars take the view that it is Haram or not permissible to visit, for the sake of tourism, places where sexual permissiveness is rampant. Their opinion is based on the principle that Islam came to impede all roads leading to evil. If some tourist activities result in the facilitation or the commission of sins, then it is not permissible for Muslims to be involved in such tourist activities (Rasma, 2008).

Most Muslim countries including Malaysia prohibit adultery. The Malaysian licensing policy prohibits prostitution and behaviours such as public or indecent displays of affection (Din, 1989; Henderson, 2003, 2008a; Zamani-Farahani and Henderson, 2010). Moreover, in some Malaysian towns, municipal enactments for lodging establishments explicitly forbid unmarried couples from being in close proximity (Din, 1989). Many Muslim authorities frown on tourism in general due to the perception that tourism is associated with sexual permissiveness (Din, 1989). Therefore, some Muslim scholars prohibit sex tourism as practised by some Arab Muslims from the Middle East in travelling to Europe or Bangkok (Din, 1989).
What is more, using sexually provocative images in marketing tourist destinations to Muslim customers is also frowned upon. According to Shariah, promotion techniques must not use sexual appeal in international marketing (Saeed et al., 2001). Female images are therefore not featured in tourism promotion in some Malaysian states like Terengganu (Henderson, 2003). Mohsin (2005) is of the opinion that the use of sexually provocative images of bikini-clad girls to promote a destination will not attract Muslim tourists.

Dress code. According to Shariah, Muslim women must not expose their hair and body. The Holy Quran states: ‘O Prophet, tell your wives and daughters and the believing women to draw their outer garments around them (when they go out or are among men). That is better in order that they may be known (to be Muslims) and not annoyed . . . ’ (Holy Qur’an, 33: 59). Men are supposed to cover their thighs (Timothy and Iverson, 2006).

In deciding tour destinations, Muslims look at the local dress codes in that particular region of the world being considered. Such considerations are to gauge the level of conformity to Islamic dress norms in order to determine if they will or will not be comfortable visiting that particular destination. This is particularly so for Arab tourists who have to observe strict dress codes in their native countries and prefer not to expose themselves and families to environments that may threaten their sense of proper dressing.

Hashim et al. (2007) demonstrates the Malaysian Tourist Board’s awareness of Islamic dress sensitivities by restricting their marketing campaigns to present only traditional Malay Muslim dress codes. Women with headscarves and men wearing Songkoks — a black rimless hat worn by Malay men usually for praying — were depicted on advertising billboards and home pages. Some conservative Malaysian states enforce appropriate dress norms prohibiting people from disturbing cultural norms by wearing revealing clothes such as bikinis. Furthermore, western tourists are expected to adorn the Islamic attire when visiting religious places like mosques (Henderson, 2003).

Zamani-Farahani and Henderson (2010) claim that Shariah laws prohibit improper dressing. Al-Hamarneh and Steiner (2004) assert that considerations of the religious conservatism of any particular region including prescribed dress codes should be respected. Such cultural considerations are expected more so of tourism operators in all aspects of the tourism industry as they are interacting directly and regularly with foreign tourists (Weidenfeld and Ron, 2008).

METHODOLOGY

The objective of this study is to explore Islamic religious attributes that may be important to Muslim travellers. In order to achieve this objective, focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted and were followed up with interviews to explore opinions and travel experiences in more depth. This combination of the FGD and the interviews has its advantages. First, in identifying a range of Islamic religious attributes from the FGD. Second, to explore in depth, by conducting interviews using a relatively wide range of participants in order to discover more Islamic attributes and to check the conclusions with the FGD (Morgan, 1996). The FGD and the interviews are research techniques pertaining to qualitative research (Myers, 2009, p. 121).

The aim of the FGD is to collect information through group interaction but the interview is considered an opportunity to discover new information from individuals (Cavana et al., 2008, p. 138). The advantages of FGDs in this research are to generate a broad range of information, insight and ideas related to Islamic attributes of destination and to cover the topic in flexible way, while the disadvantage of the FGDs is that the lack of structure may make the results subject to the interviewer’s influence.

Semi-structured questions were designed in this study for the purpose of conducting interviews and FGDs. The participants were asked about the Islamic attributes they would require when travelling in a Muslim country or a non-Muslim country. They were then asked specifically about these attributes when visiting Muslim countries. This was followed by probing questions that sought to explore in detail specific attributes generated from FGDs. The semi-structured questions were related to some attributes such as access to mosque, prayer facilities/room at tourism sites,
presence of loud public pronouncement of Azan, Placement of Qibla stickers, provision of a copy of the Quran in hotel room, Halal issues (food, alcoholic drinks, kitchen, gambling), segregated services provided in hotels, Islamic dress code, prostitutions, display of affection between sexes and general morality.

Two FGDs were conducted in June 2009. The participants of these focus groups were international PhD students currently studying in Malaysia in different areas of research. The method used was ‘convenience sampling method’ and this was carried out by contacting students in the PhD programme. All of them are Muslims and most of them are religious based on their own assessment of themselves. The participants of FGD 1 consisted of eight males from Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Mauritania, Oman, Jordan, Yemen, Egypt and Sudan. The duration of FGD1 was one and a half hours. The participants of FGD 2 consisted of seven females from Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Nigeria, Oman, Turkey and Algeria. The duration of FGD 2 was one hour and fifteen minutes and the participants did not agree to record the session digitally. The reason for this may be culturally related. The FGDs were broken down into two groups according to gender because many/some ladies from some Middle East countries may be more reserved if they are in the presence of men, and this may affect their response to questions, especially if the issue involves special needs of women tourists. All FGD participants had overseas travel experience for various purposes such as tourism, business, learning and visiting friends.

A total of 53 interviews were conducted with tourists in Kuala Lumpur, the capital city of Malaysia, 27 interviews in July 2009 and 26 interviews in October 2009. The interviewees were patrons of international hotels in Kuala Lumpur around the ‘Golden Triangle Area’ where many international chain hotels are located. The respondents were chosen by using convenience sampling method. Two researchers approached as many Muslim tourists as possible at these hotels and requested them to participate in the study. Thirty-eight tourists did not accept to be interviewed. The duration of most interviews was between 35–45 minutes. Forty-one interviews were recorded digitally. The rest were unable to be recorded due to objections from the interviewees who were females from the Middle East. The interviewer transcribed both the FGDs as well as all interview sessions. Some interviewees from the Middle East preferred to communicate in Arabic while the rest were conducted in English. The interviewer adopted the probing technique during the session to encourage the participants to provide more details. All participants (FGDs and interviewees) were asked to describe themselves whether he or she is secular, mildly religious, religious or very religious. Some demographic information was also gathered. The digital recording of the interviews was changed into text. The data was organized for easy categorization and systematic data analysis.

FINDINGS

The results of the two FGDs indicate that there are differences between the attitudes of female and male respondents. Female respondents focused more on privacy and segregation of gender on entertainment centres while male focus more on worship facilities and Halal issues. Nine participants (FGDs and interviews) were secular, 22 participants were mildly religious, 26 were religious and 11 were very religious. According to the demographic profile of the interviewees, 30 of them were males and 23 were females. Twenty two interviewees were between 18 and 29 years old, 19 interviewees were between 30 and 39 years old and 12 were above 40 years old. Thirty nine of the interviewees were married and 14 were single. Regarding the educational level, six interviewees were intermediate, 31 interviewees were university degree holder and 16 were post graduate.

Results of the analysis were categorized into two major aspects which are tangible and intangible. The tangible aspect consists of Islamic religious facilities such as worship facilities and Halal food.

Tangible aspects

Prayer facilities

Mosque. All interviewees were concerned about the availability of Mosques (Masjid) or...
prayer rooms for their tourist destination. Easy access to a mosque/prayer room is considered a vital aspect for Muslim tourists and should not be ignored by tourism planning but should be considered a necessary service. This can be shown in the following response:

... Masjid or prayer room must be available in the streets and public places. In other words, a prayer room should be available in all places which I may visit in the destination such as hotels, shopping malls, and airports. Even in the airplane to destination, it should allocate a place for prayer. (FGD No. 1)

Masjid is available in most of the places in the destination during my journey, in shopping malls, highways... and of course in the hotel. (Int. No.1, USA)

It is noticed from the previous responses that Muslim tourists expect easy access to a Masjid and/or prayer room to be a primary requirement in Muslim countries. They also highlighted that they expect to find prayer facilities readily accessible during tourist activities.

Quran and Qiblah direction pointer. All interviewees emphasized the importance of the provision of Qurans and Qiblah direction pointers in hotel rooms. Some proposed that one or two simple Islamic books to be provided in hotel rooms and in aeroplane seat pockets.

... It will be fine if I find Quran book in hotel room, some Islamic leaflets in the airplane seat pocket, Makkah direction pointer, Sejadda for prayer (prayer mat), simple Islamic book in hotel room... (FGD No. 1)

... I need the Holy Quran book inside the hotel room, some Islamic books which I can read; I don’t want any statue or sculpture like a Buddhist. I found that in India when I was there. Also direction of Qibla is important to me ... (Int. No.15, Djibouti)

The Quran is the holy book for Muslims. Muslims are highly encouraged to read the Holy Quran. Although some conservative Muslims have a soft copy of the Quran on their hand phones, the hard copy represents the preferable option for reading. Moreover, since praying towards Makkah is a basic requirement of Muslims’ prayers, the Makkah direction pointer is a basic demand of Muslims when they perform their prayers away from home or at places where they are unsure of the exact direction towards Makkah. Some hotel industry practitioners, even some hotels in non-Muslim countries, already provide Qiblah pointers inside their hotel rooms but some participants report that they did not find it in some hotels in Muslim countries.

Muslim toilets. Thirty-six interviewees who have travelled to western destinations complained about the bathroom because they could not perform ablution (Muslim mandatory washing before performing prayers). There is no such facility inside airport toilets and hotels. Therefore, they requested Muslim toilets to be provided in all airports, hotels and public places.

Muslim toilet is very important in airport because the regular toilets provide only tissue. As Muslims, we need water supply inside the toilet. It should be found in public places because in the hotel you can find water but in public it is difficult. (Int. No.14, Thailand)

I will be very happy if I find ... and Bidet in the bathroom. (Int. No.2, Canada)

Muslim followers must do ablution before prayers. They are required to clean themselves with water when using the toilet. Some countries adopt modern toilet designs which do not enable users to wash themselves using water; providing only tissue. However, some Muslim countries have modified this style and have adopted a Muslim design for their bathrooms that provide water. From previous participant responses, they find it satisfying when water facilities are made available in toilets.

Halal food. All interviewees reported that the availability of Halal food is a basic need for all destinations. It is noticed that all interviewees need Halal meals in flights to their destination. Moreover, they recommended that hotels and restaurants in the destination should provide Halal meals free from pork and alcohol. Some
of them were worried about the preparation of Halal meals. Seven interviewees highlighted that the kitchen should also be Halal which means that Halal and non-Halal foods cannot be cooked together in the same kitchen and with the same utensils.

... I need Halal food to be available. The mosques and Halal food restaurants, mostly they are close to each other. Last week, I was in Cambodia. Once I was close to the Masjid I found Halal restaurants. (Int. No.13, Turkey)

... Some hotels, in breakfast they provide Halal food and non-Halal food from the same kitchen that means the Halal and non Halal food are cooked together using the same facilities. I need Halal kitchen. Moreover, some Arabian tourists can’t read English so they eat non-Halal meat. (Int. No.12, Egypt)

The travel experiences of some participants highlighted that easy-to-find Halal food is one factor in choosing the destination for their vacation. Some are very sensitive regarding Halal issues and go well beyond Halal labels. They want to make sure the meat and ingredients used in cooking are Halal and do this by usually asking the service providers. On top of this, they also ask whether the kitchen is Halal or not. In response to this, some hotels in Malaysia allocate two kitchens: Halal and non-Halal.

Twenty-eight interviewees prefer not to see the consumption of alcohol in tourism sites, shopping malls, hotels and parks. They are not happy if they see someone drinking alcohol in Muslim destinations. Some proposed that airline operators designate non-drinking sections in aeroplanes. Five interviewees were concerned about the safety of their children when they are around alcohol drinkers and the fear that their children may not be capable to distinguish between alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages.

When I was in Australia, one of my kids opened the refrigerator in the hotel room and took a can of alcohol and asked me to open it. I was shocked He cannot differentiate between the Coca-Cola can from the beer can. So the hotel should not sell alcohol. (Int. No.7, Morocco).

... In the flight, one thing that really disturbed me was that they served alcohol. It is not because people are drinking alcohol in my environment. It is not only that. It is also because I too paid for the alcohol. How? They calculate the average for people who may drink alcohol and put that in the ticket cost. So my contribution will go to another person who is drinking alcohol. So I don’t need alcohol for two reasons: the environment and my contribution for those who are drinking. (Int. No.8, Nigeria)

**Intangible aspects**

The intangible aspects relating to the general environment experienced by tourists sometimes cannot be helped. However, interviewees appreciate if there is an Islamic environment in their tourist destination, meaning an environment which is Islamic entertainment, complies with Islamic dress codes, observant of Islamic morality and Islamic call (Azan) for prayer.

*Islamic entertainment.* Thirty-nine interviewees gave high priority to finding Islamic-oriented recreations such as segregation of men and women’s beaches, segregated swimming pools and gyms. Some female interviewees reported that they cannot enjoy swimming because sometimes the rules require that they wear swimming attires not conforming to Islamic teachings and culture. Some proposed different time sessions for the exclusive use of the swimming pool of either men or women. Twenty-six interviewees preferred not to take their families to beaches or swimming pools where women wear bikinis. Twenty-one interviewees opted for the banning of adult video channels in hotel entertainment.

... As a Muslim, I need men-only beach and women-only beach. I visited Turkey before. They build walls with rocks. So if you swim at the men’s side of the beach, you cannot see the women’s side. Separate swimming pools for me as a woman.
I would like to enjoy myself also but I want to make sure men cannot see me. (Int. No.10, Libya)

I need . . . strictly covered swimming pool for my wife and the same with the gym also. (Int. No.4, Saudi Arabia)

I will be happy if I find . . . beaches with separate areas for women and men. (Int. No.1, USA)

. . . When I was in Jakarta, I found porn channels in the hotel TV. It is not suitable for me as a Muslim nor for my family. (Int. No.24, Kuwait)

I wish in Muslim country taxis with female drivers’ service are provided for female passengers and for family. We have this service in my country if the client so request. (No.20, Emirates)

The reason for the previous responses may be interpreted by the issue of mixing of the sexes in Islam. Free mixing of the sexes along with inappropriate and revealing dress is strictly prohibited by the Shariah. These acts are prohibited because they are among the causes of Fitnah (temptation or trial that implies evil consequences), the arousal of desires, committing indecent acts and false practices. Among the many proofs of the prohibition of the meeting and mixing of men and women in the Holy Quran is: ‘. . . And when ye ask (his ladies) for anything ye want, ask them from before a screen: that makes for greater purity for your hearts and for theirs . . .’ (Holy Qur’an, 33: 53). In line with the issue of mixing of the sexes, the services provider for Muslim tourist may assign female staff for women and male staff for men.

Another reason may be the cultural factor. Some Muslims, especially Arabian tourists, are highly conservative. They want to enjoy the services provided but at the same time want to follow their Islamic culture.

Islamic dress codes. Twenty-six interviewees reported that they prefer it if the Islamic dress code was prevalent in their desired destination. They prefer waitresses wearing hijab and not short skirt. Most interviewees said that they appreciate it if female hotel staffs wear hijab. However, these suggestions may be difficult to apply in Muslim countries which are more liberal such as Turkey where wearing of hijab is not allowed in some public areas (e.g. universities and government buildings). In these countries, hijab-clad female employees may have to work in specially designated areas. Moreover, some interviewees proposed that it will be better if employees were Muslims.

. . . Actually, a waitress should dress Hijab and not tight clothes. They have to serve me only. (Int. No.3, Iraq).

. . . I appreciate it if there are no pictures of naked people in ads especially bill boards. Hijabs are the dominant dress in the destination and no free shows (naked or semi-naked bodies) in public places. (Int. No.5, Algeria).

. . . I have travelled to European countries but I did not feel comfortable in some issues. For example, I hope that the hotel employees are friendly to Muslims because sometimes they don’t respect Muslim women who are wearing Nikab (Hijab with covered face). So it will be better if they (the employees) are Muslim. (Int. No.20, Emirates)

General Islamic morality. Thirty-one interviewees highly appreciated tourism operators who control exposure to indecent behaviour. The interviewees prefer not to expose themselves and their families to indecent public conduct which is contrary to Islamic teachings like public kissing, prostitution and the public showing of affection between sexes.

. . . In the hotel, I will appreciate it if there is no sexual interaction near my room. I don’t want such exposure. It is a shame that some hotels supply prostitutes especially in Muslim countries. (Int.No.6, Egypt)

. . . The most important thing is regarding the couple; Boy friend and girl friend and prostitute. Sometimes, they have interaction in public. They are showing affection. If you have kids, it will affect the ethics of your children. To be honest, it cannot be controlled. I know it is very
hard to control. At least give advance information if the places have such things. (Int. No.19, Turkey).

I would like to see good morality in public spaces and parks in terms of relationship between sexes, such as no public kissing. (Int. No.23, Saudi Arabia).

Islamic call (Azan) for prayer. Thirty-one interviewees were concerned about the need for public calling of the Azan (prayer time). Destination operators should provide information about Muslim prayer times. Seventeen interviewees recommended a prayer time call during flights or journeys to their destinations, hotels, shopping malls and parks. Some also requested prayer time clocks (which ring with each prayer time) or a prayer timetable in the hotel room.

... I need also Prayer time call in the airplane, airport, hotel or at least prayer timetable in hotel room. (Int. No.2, Canada)

... Prayer timetable or Alfajr clock (Prayer time clock brand) should be found in hotel room. (Int. No.4, Saudi Arabia).

In Islam, Muslims should pray five times daily but they are permitted to merge and shorten the prayers while travelling according to the length of the journey and other Islamic legal rules and requirements. As such, the participants preferred that they be reminded about prayer times in order that they may choose between praying at the usual times or merge them.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This research has investigated the Islamic needs of Muslim travellers and has focused on the Islamic attributes of destinations within the Muslim world. The data was collected by conducting two FGDs and 53 interviews with Muslim tourists in Malaysia. Two major aspects are identified as Islamic attributes of destinations that may attract Muslim tourists; tangible attributes and intangible attributes. The tangible attributes include prayer facilities and Halal food while intangible attributes include Islamic entertainment, Islamic dress codes, general Islamic morality and Islamic call for prayer.

The results show that mutual consensus is found regarding easy access to worship places (Masjid/prayer room), easy to find Halal food, availability of the Quran and the Qiblah direction pointer. Islamic toilets and Islamic entertainment were reported as highly prioritized tangible attributes. It is also concluded that the intangible aspects are limited only to Muslim countries because these aspects are not realistic within the context of Westernized non-Muslim societies. Moreover, the application of the proposed intangible aspects may represent challenges facing the tourism industry in Muslim countries willing to satisfy non-Muslim tourists.

Given the Muslim tourist market is a niche market, destination marketers should pay more attention to this important market and its financial potential. However, the majority of Muslim countries is classified under the third world and is also poor countries except for a few oil producers. Muslims are not a single market because there are vast differences among them regarding their understanding of Islam and the degree of their will to practise it. For example, wearing the head cover (hijab) as a dress code for Muslim women is observed by some and not observed by others. Moreover, the degree of religiosity is considered an important factor behind these differences which impact on the services required by Muslims. In other words, the degree of religiosity of a Muslim tourist affects his or her needs. Therefore, it is better to satisfy Muslim tourists by designing packages that suit their demands. This indicates that Shariah compliant products or services provided may satisfy Muslim tourists and is dependent on his or her level of religiosity.

It is not expected that all Muslims practise Islam correctly. Tourism operators cannot differentiate between those who observe Islamic Shariah strictly and those who do not. It may be a good option if Islamic religious sentiments are catered to for Muslim tourists because the majority of Muslims are nearly committed Muslims. In this situation non-committed Muslims are free to choose between being catered to in the Islamic way or not. It is
only logical to offer packages that cater for the majority and make allowances for those who wish to select other options.

The availability of Islamic religious attributes need not affect non-Muslims. Tourism operators should provide services that cater for non-Muslim needs by allocating places exclusively for them to pursue those activities that are prohibited by Islam. For example, the hotel or aeroplane may allocate special sections for those wishing to drink alcohol along the same line as smoking areas in airports. An Islamic environment should be guided by Islamic teachings implemented by imposing certain rules and restrictions regulating behaviour in public. Awareness programmes should be designed for non-Muslim tourists regarding behaviour not accepted by Islam.

It is noticeable from the interviews that Islamic culture plays a role in those Islamic aspects which tourists require to be provided for their travels. For example, expectations of tourists from Saudi Arabia are considerably much higher compared with other nationalities. This is because Saudi Arabian Muslims are relatively more conservative compared with Muslims from other countries. This is because Muslim Arabian culture is highly conservative. The following suggestions are generated from the exploratory discussion in this study and they may be useful for tourist operators to keep in mind for offering services/products catering to Muslim needs:

(1) Provision of maps that indicate locations of mosques/prayer facilities by tourism information centres, airports, hotels, parks, etc., and which clearly indicate the red light districts in order that Muslims avoid these places.

(2) Provision of prayer timetables by tourism information centres, airports, hotels and parks, etc.

(3) Muslim tourists prefer that alcoholic drinks are not provided in the hotel room refrigerator. If a Muslim tourist requires one, he or she may request for it.

(4) Destination marketers need to identify and address the Islamic culture of different nationalities in order to be design packages that satisfy the needs of those nationalities.

(5) Banning of adult channels in hotel entertainment. Muslims tourists may not be happy if their children are exposed to such things.

(6) Hospitality operators should take into consideration Islamic architecture and design in the hotel design.

(7) It is preferable if hotels provide Siwak (natural toothbrush made from the arak tree) for Muslim tourists in their rooms.

(8) It is preferable that travel agents choose hotels for Muslims that are far from red-light districts. Tourist guides should avoid visiting these places on tour programmes.

(9) It is recommended that hotels hire female staff who observe Islamic dress codes to cater for the need of tourists who are concerned about this issue.

(10) Allocating female staff for women and male staff for men such as availability of taxis with female drivers’ service for female passengers that satisfies the needs of some Middle Eastern families.

The findings of this study should help marketers better understand ‘Islamic tourism’, develop marketing strategies to attract Muslim tourists and also encourage repeat purchases. A destination can enhance the probability of its selection by identifying and marketing its ability to meet the needs that their chosen travel segments consider important. However, this study has limitations related to the data used. The quantity of data may be limited as the two FGDs and 53 interviews may not be sufficient for the purpose of generalizing the findings. Furthermore, although there are censuses regarding all the attributes proposed among Muslim groups according to Islamic law, other Islamic attributes may be ignored as there are no participants from other Muslim groups. Finally, this research recommends that the needs of Muslims travellers be studied empirically. Scales should be developed to study Islamic religious attributes for quantitative research which may be useful for the generalization of results.

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Marketing Travel Destinations to Muslim Tourists


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